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“Strengthening The Bonds Of Environmental Cooperation Between Security Forces And Environmental Institutions”

USSOUTHCOM’s Regional Environmental Security Conference

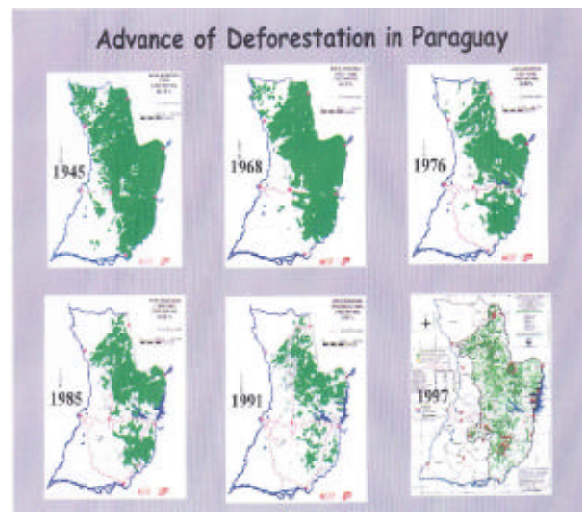
by

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Environmental Security: The Common Ground for Cooperation

Building trust and cooperation between the military and civilian sectors in the nations of South America’s southern cone is an essential step in their continuing maturation as democracies. During most of the 20th Century, a state of tension existed between these two sectors because of the role played by the military as either the primary enforcement instrument of the ruling oligarchy, or as the actual government in being. Today, in order to set the conditions for continued growth and stability, these two sectors must cooperate both nationally and multilaterally in order to build confidence in the government and to promote regional stability. The vehicle chosen to encourage this necessary dialogue is environmental security and its adjunct of disaster response planning.

Major environmental security issues in the Southern Cone include the illicit drug trade, urban pollution, water usage issues, hazardous waste disposal, desertification, wetlands and forest resource management. These issues are transnational in nature, and require multilateral cooperation for their resolution. In addition to



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being major sources of regional instability, they can create the conditions for a major natural or man-made disaster. Unlike any other arm of a central government the armed forces have the internal capability to conduct detailed planning, to monitor ongoing programs, and to rapidly respond to an environmental disaster with transportation, communications, medical, organizational, and engineering capabilities. They form the bridge between the “first responders” and the central government’s long-term recovery efforts following a major environmental security incident. For these reasons it is essential that the coordination requirements between the armed forces and the civilian agencies they support be fully understood and codified.

With the goals of enhancing environmental cooperation between defense and environmental authorities of the region’s states, and examining opportunities for multi-lateral and inter-agency cooperation, the Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL), United States Army War College, along with the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment (DUSD, I&E), and the U.S. Embassy Asuncion, cosponsored United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) Regional Environmental Security Conference “Strengthening The Bonds Of Environmental Cooperation Between Security Forces And Environmental Institutions.” Co-hosted by the Paraguayan Ministries of Defense and the Environment, the conference was conducted on May 28-31, 2002 in Asuncion, Paraguay. In addition to the host country, key military and civilian leaders at the flag officer and vice-ministerial level represented Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

Regional Conditions and Requirements



HON Miquel Candia Fleitas
Minister of Defense, Paraguay
Opening the Conference

The co-hosting of the conference by the Paraguayan Ministries of Defense and the Environment was a visible demonstration of the cooperation that was the objective of the event. This interagency partnership was also reflected in the makeup of the other countries’ delegations. During the opening session each nation’s presentations were team efforts shared by both the defense and environmental departments. In their presentations the participants demonstrated an understanding of the need for regional cooperation in the identification and response to possible natural or man-made disasters. Each country outlined its national environmental regulations and the role required of the armed forces to support the civilian government in disaster response planning and in general military

stewardship of the environment. For example, the Argentine government has assigned the armed forces a subsidiary mission of environmental preservation with the objective of improving the quality of life within the individual communities they influence.

In all cases the country briefings reflected the primacy of the civilian emergency management apparatus in the planning, coordination, and response to disasters. The military was identified as the key support organization with response, stewardship, training, and education responsibilities. Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay have integrated the military into the national emergency response system and have assigned tasks to the military that include not only response, but also prevention and repair. Chile provided an extensive description of their active disaster response simulation and training capability, a state of the art gaming facility focused on

civil/military coordination in responding to natural or man-made disasters. This capability has assisted Chile in developing its coordinated responses to forest fires, flooding, and other environmental events. It has great potential as a regional venue for multilateral disaster response training.

It was apparent from the national presentations and the ensuing discussions that environmental stewardship and disaster response are now accepted military missions in the region. The engineering capabilities resident in the military forces were invaluable in the repair of environmentally damaged areas and as immediate response forces to disasters. Paraguay is especially aggressive in employing its military engineers to support Pilcomayo River projects. Although the most necessary assets were in short supply, and resource shortfalls and changing national priorities threatened the effectiveness of response capabilities, the Argentine representative made the observation that "...with crisis came opportunities."

Available Resources

It was on this resource issue that the U.S. panelists focused their efforts. Representing the DUSD (I&E), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) they identified technical and information sharing support currently available to assist regional environmental security and disaster response planning efforts. Although these presentations did not directly talk to the region's problems they effectively put the message across that river and wetlands management, forest fires, and clean up are areas where the U.S. has "been there, and done that", and that our lessons learned, both good and bad, were available to be shared.

A Regional Solution

At the conclusion of the conference the participating South American countries requested USSOUTHCOM's support and participation in institutionalizing environmental security and disaster response cooperation within the civilian and military structures of their governments. This proposal was a Chilean initiative and included recommendations for the establishment of an international regional coordinating commission and for the establishment of a coordination group that would include the participating countries, and some NGO representation to develop an information and technology-sharing plan. Also included was a request for assistance in integrating the military environmental stewardship and disaster response concepts into the professional military education (PME) programs of all six countries.

The Road Ahead

In his closing remarks to the conferees, Ambassador David N. Greenlee, U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay, observed that the conference had met its primary objective – to initiate dialogue among the countries – and expressed hope that it would lead to more intense and effective cooperation. He asked that the conference co-sponsors continue to work with his office to take advantage of the momentum and good will developed at this event.



Mr. Robert Brown
USSOUTHCOM
Discusses the "Way Ahead"

In response to this request, USSOUTHCOM, supported by the U.S. interagency community, intends to continue to team with the Department of State Environmental Hubs to conduct regional environmental security conferences in Central and South America. The importance of the inter-regional dialogue cannot be underestimated in its contribution to stability within the region. With the Southern Cone nations' regional proposal as a framework, future efforts can focus on the development of information and technology-sharing programs, and the integration of key environmental security concepts into the regional PME programs.

Conclusion

Environmental cooperation promotes overall regional and hemispheric stability and strengthens military and civilian relationships. Participation in discussions and activities that assist in changing the environmental impact of militaries from the negative to the neutral to the positive is in the interests of the Southern Cone nations and the United States. Long-term success, however, depends on effective follow-up. Three target areas appear promising: cooperation to minimize the environmental impact of military operations; improving regional capabilities to respond to disasters; and, training and information exchange to better manage the trans-boundary rivers of the Plata Basin.

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